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ABSTRACT

Because college radio offers a less structured environment, a natural habitat is created which provides for broadcasting experimental shows such as Starship Earth, an environmental radio show on East Stroudsburg University's (Pennsylvania) college radio station, WESS 90.3 FM. Environmental problems, issues, and solutions are discussed on the show. The basic format of Starship Earth is an informal round-table discussion involving an advisor, students (both undergraduate and graduate) and guest speakers (professors and community leaders). The show lasts 1 hour with a break at the bottom of the hour for station identification and pertinent announcements. Brief poetry readings and musical selections that reflect the nature of the discussions are interspersed throughout the show. The advisor, a faculty member from the Environmental Studies or Biology Department, plays a key role in lending credibility to the show, providing a focal point for discussions, keeping discussion relevant to the topic, and providing current research findings for each week's topic. To plan for each show, the panel makes a list of potential topics at least 2 weeks in advance. Arrangements are then made for a guest speaker. Listeners are encouraged to call and express both supporting and opposing viewpoints. College radio advisors can use Starship Earth as a model for creating an environmental radio program in their own university. An appendix lists the general topics and speakers. (AEF)

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Starship Earth: A Model for Advising Environmental Discussions on College Radio

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For Presentation at the 1996
Broadcast Education Association Convention
in Las Vegas, Nevada

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INTRODUCTION

This presentation is a model for the development and production of an academically advised environmental radio program. I recognized the absolute need for a radio program of this nature as a viable option to help to inform the mass populace about the state of the world we live in and to show the impact that each one of us can make on our environment both within our community and on a global level. These changes require the participation of all humankind, however small the investment might be. Large scale changes can be made only when we combine our forces, on both an individual and global level.

This brings forth a major question: How do you make people aware that they have the ability to conceptualize environmental change, as well as the ability to carry out those changes? Certainly there are many vehicles that can carry information and thus create change, including formalized classrooms, lobbying efforts, sit-ins, television programs, and radio shows to name a few. However, I argue that college radio is an excellent medium of communication to express this information. Moreover, it is my hope in this paper to share the experience of producing a radio show called "Starship Earth" as a model for advising environmental radio at other college radio stations. What follows in this paper is: 1). the potential of

college radio, 2). a description of WESS 90.3 FM, 3). the model of Starship Earth, including, format discussions, and audience participation.

THE POTENTIAL OF COLLEGE RADIO

Our views of ourselves and our involvement within the community, nation and world are shaped most frequently by what we hear on the radio and what we see on the television (Noll. 1983). Using radio to raise a population's environmental awareness can be effective because radio reaches almost everywhere and is accessible to over 90% of the population (Barnouw. 1949). Therefore, radio is a medium with a unique potential because of its wide listening audience and its power to persuade.

A university setting is an ideal place for an environmental radio program, and a campus radio station is an ideal outlet. A university provides immediate resources in the form of professors, inquiring students, reference materials, and professionals who are willing to share their experiences. By combining these assets with the spontaneity and informal atmosphere of college radio we were able to put together an entertaining, informative, educational program, Starship Earth.

College radio provides the listener with a looser alternative format of entertainment and vital information rather than the heavily structured formats of commercial radio. Because college radio offers a less structured environment, a natural habitat is created which provides for broadcasting experimental, environmental shows such as Starship Earth. In addition, vast

resources are available in college settings for use on college radio, such as libraries of research papers, faculty expertise, and students who are eager to affect some change.

The listener's state of mind plays an active role in the enjoyment of a radio program is based on mental or emotional arousal. (Noll. 1983) In this is the key to radio's effectiveness in raising awareness levels. That is to say, enjoyment levels are based on the mental pictures, events and ideas that are formed while listening to any radio program (Noll 1983).

WESS 90.3 FM

East Stroudsburg University is a small university within the Pennsylvania State University System and is the home of WESS 90.3 FM, a non-commercial, educational college radio station. WESS broadcasts at 1000 watts, and has the third most powerful signal among radio stations in the Pennsylvania State University System. The station has the ability to reach an approximate range of fifty miles in diameter, with a potential listening audience of one hundred thousand people. The programming format for WESS is Diversified, featuring a variety of alternative musical shows, such as: jazz, blues, classical, modern rock, metal, urban, esoteric sounds, etc. In addition, WESS has many educational programs such as: an interview show, which features guests from the university campus and the neighboring communities; vintage radio, which are radio programs that were produced from the 1920-1950; sports, which features highlights, statistics, and live coverage; and Starship Earth, an environmental radio show, the model for which I will now describe.

THE MODEL OF STARSHIP EARTH

Starship Earth is a radio program designed to inform people in an easily understood format about important environmental issues that we face today. Environmental problems and issues are discussed on the show, as well as solutions that we can put into practice in our own backyards. Since we realized that not all members of our listening audience would be students or professionals in the field of Environmental Studies, we had an added task of making potentially complex information absolutely understandable. Judging from our audience's response to Starship Earth through phone calls, personal comments, and letters, the show has been understandable and very successful.

The genesis of Starship Earth evolved from a brainstorm. It was obvious to me that many talented people on college campuses were working diligently to stop the destruction of our environment. But I wondered: How were their voices being heard? How were their concerns, questions, and dilemmas being answered? Where could they find solutions? These questions as well as many others brought about the evolution of this environmental program.

FORMAT

The basic format of Starship Earth is an informal round-table discussion involving an advisor, students (both undergraduate and graduate), and guest speakers (professors and community leaders). The show lasts one hour with a break at the bottom of the hour for station identification and other pertinent announcements. Throughout the show we take several moments for poetry readings and musical selections that reflect the nature of the discussion for that show.

We formed a team consisting of five regular panel members including an advisor, three student members for the discussion panel, and one student board operator. The members included the coordinator and academic advisor of East Stroudsburg University's Environmental Studies Program, an undergraduate English major, two Graduate students in the department of Biological Sciences, and an undergraduate Environmental Studies student. We found that mixing scientific and literary backgrounds added humor and provided a natural flow of information, questions and potential solutions that were thought provoking for our listening audience. It was this mixture plus an overall laid-back tone that created the atmosphere for informal discussions to ensue.

Four members sit in a conference room around a table, and one member sits in a separate studio who runs the board and uses a separate microphone (see Appendix for seating chart). The members and the board operator can communicate with designated hand signals through a window which separates the two rooms. These signals acknowledge the times for station breaks, telephone callers,

poetry readings, and musical selections to be inserted into the discussion.

The board operator opens the show with carted material. In addition, he announces each member of the panel as well as the guest speaker and the topic. The guest speaker's discussion prompts the topic based on his area of expertise. The ensuing discussion is informal, each member of the panel poses questions, thoughts, and information, which are anchored by the advisor. The guest speaker, the advisor and the panel members proceed to discuss the issue, pose questions, add opinions, philosophical ideas and suggestions which the listening audience can apply in their own lives. This makes for a lively interactive discussion, rather than a formalized lecture which can be boring to the listening audience. Anyone on the panel can talk at anytime, with preference going to the guest speaker. In most cases, the discussion returns to the advisor for his expertise.

The guest speakers have been experts such as: physicians, raptor specialists, and wolf biologists (see Appendix for a complete list). By adding environmentally oriented music, poetry, and literary readings to the format we have broadened the entertainment content. In addition, calls are taken from listeners during the program and integrated into the topic in the form of answers and tangential discussions. By integrating all of these features, we have been able to provide our listening audience with a comprehensible and entertaining program.

ACADEMIC ADVISOR'S SPECIAL ROLE

The academic advisor plays a key role in the airing of Starship Earth. By including a faculty member from the Environmental Studies or Biology Department, we added verifiability to the topical information as well as a leading expert in the field. Therefore, this faculty member is absolutely necessary in order to produce a credible environmental show, to provide a focal point for the discussions, to keep the discussions relevant to the topic, and to provide current research findings for each week's topics. In addition, the faculty advisor helps to answer the telephone caller's questions, assists in acquiring guest speakers, and provides the information for the educational portion of the show.

SPECIFIC MEMBER ROLES

Our board operator was an English major. Sometimes educational programming--especially a science program--can be boring and too technical for the audience. Therefore, the role of our board operator was to add music, sound effects, poetry, and literary readings which related to the discussions. By doing this he was able to break the tension of the vital and sometimes overwhelming environmental issues that we discussed. This added to the entertainment value as well as the informative, educational portion of the program.

The three remaining members of the program were all students from the environmental and biology departments. With various levels of expertise as well as various philosophical, and socioeconomic questions that each of these students would pose, the show often covers great amounts of information both of a factual nature as well as of a speculative nature. This adds depth and quite often controversy to the show.

The final ingredient to our panel is that two of the members had no practical radio experience, while three of the members did. This mix opened the door to panelists with practical experience who accounted for professionalism, and panelists without experience added a sense of spontaneity that comes with being a radio amateur.

DISCUSSIONS

To plan for each show, the panel would put together a list of potential topics for discussion at least two weeks in advance. Our next step was to contact and make the arrangements for guest speakers. The members of the panel felt that the inclusion of specialty environmental experts relative to the topic would add another dimension to the weekly program.

During each show we would try to continuously provide many sources for further information including pertinent addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of various individuals and agencies for listeners to contact. For example, we have given addresses and telephone numbers for local, state, and national governmental offices for information on the clean air and water acts, and addresses of

contact points within the environmentally active organization called the "greens".

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Through audience feedback, we have discovered both supporting and opposing viewpoints to our discussions. During the show we try to encourage audience participation by giving out the telephone numbers and asking for comments, questions, or concerns. As a result, we have had callers expressing various viewpoints from favorite organic recipes to an agreement that we must change the way we are living or we will not have anywhere to live. We have also had callers whose opinions were in total disagreement with some of the suggestions that were proposed on the show, stating for example, that the planet's resources were infinite, and that we should not worry about it.

During one particular show, we were discussing population and reproductive rights, when we received a phone call from a local high school student. This student was unfamiliar with the program but had come across it accidentally. She called to express that she felt her school system failed to provide adequate information on reproductive responsibility. She commented that she was surprised to hear such a diversity of viewpoints on Starship Earth, when her educational exposure had been so narrow in the classroom. She was grateful to find that issues such as reproductive rights were being openly addressed. She felt that it was time that the education system

in this country offered a more comprehensive program on responsible family planning. This telephone call demonstrates the need for a radio program like Starship Earth. We feel the information presented on the program helps to educate and inspire our audience, and supports those who are trying to climb the mountain of information coming out on our environment

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper was designed to present a model for environmental discussions on college radio. It was our objective to present issues so that all members of the listening audience might feel motivated to do their part in preserving the environment. Moreover, we wanted to present complex and technical ideas in an understandable way. Plus, we wanted to use the unique resources that are accessible at a university. We as a global community are faced with some very large --and at times seemingly insurmountable-- obstacles. Many times it would be easier to throw in the towel, so to speak, but I believe it is our responsibility as college radio presenters and educators to lead the way in what appears in many ways to be some of our darkest hours. As we fan the spark that has begun to catch, the heat
from the flame will bring forth new ideas, new methods, and the power to motivate our listeners to a new level of environmental awareness, where we are not trying to make nature our own, but rather we are trying to be in balance with all that exists around us.

College radio advisors can take this model to create an environmental radio program in their own university. This model

hopefully can provide an adaptable structure to create a vital interaction with your listening communities to help save the environment. Starship Earth works because it takes complex issues and through our panel design gets them across in an understandable way. You can do the same.

APPENDIX 1: TOPICS and SPEAKERS

General Topic:

1. The formation of the Cosmos and the Earth--

Specific Talking:

eukaryotic/prokaryotic bacterial evolution.

Academic Advisor: Professor of Environmental Studies

General Topic:

2. The evolution of Mankind--

Specific Talking:

evolution versus creationism

Guest Speaker: Professor of Biology

General Topic:

3. The switch from a Hunter/Gatherer Society to an Agrarian Society--

Specific Talking:

how this switch has helped to create many of the present issues and various political/economic/philosophical impacts.

Academic Advisor: Professor of Environmental Studies

General Topic:

4. Overpopulation--

Specific Talking:

A look at overpopulation as the main source of environmental problems and the need for responsible family planning.

Guest Speaker: Vice President of N. E. Planned Parenthood

General Topic:

5. Environmental Toxicology--

Specific Talking:

A look at the impact of water, waste and air pollutants. What are the sources for these pollutants, what is the impact and how can we "clean it up"?

Academic Advisor: Professor of Environmental Studies

General Topic:

6. Physiological Toxicology--

Specific Talking:

How the foods that we eat, the air that we breathe, the water that we drink affects our health and well being. This segment included both a medical and an holistic perspective of toxicology.

Guest Speaker: Medical Doctor

General Topic:

7. Organic foods and products--

Specific Talking:

The benefits of organic foods and natural products, including vitamins and cosmetics.

Guest speaker: Biologist

General Topic:

8. Animal Biology--

Specific Talking:

Our relationship with animals, why we need them and how overpredation by man has seriously jeopardized the fine ecological balance of predator and prey.

Guest Speakers: Biologists and owners of the Pennsylvania Raptor and Wildlife Center

General Topic:

9. Animal Biology--

Specific Talking:

A continuation of the previous week's topic.

Guest Speaker: Raptor Biologist

General Topic:

10. Environmental Media--

Specific Talking:

A philosophical look at man's involvement in the environment and how the media sheds light on this interaction. This discussion includes journalism, radio and television coverage of various environmental issues.

Guest Speaker: Environmental Journalist

General Topic:

11. Rain forest Biology--

Specific Talking:

Why save the rain forests? What are the pros and cons of sustainable harvesting, plantation, and cattle farming

Academic Advisor: Professor of Environmental Studies

General Topic:

12. Future strategies of species--

Specific Talking:

This topic includes the loss of biodiversity and the replacement of native species with ornamental varieties of plants and "human friendly" animals. As well as the need for seed banks and zoos to protect threatened and endangered species

Academic Advisor: Professor of Environmental Studies

General Topic:

13. Soil Sustainability and plant biology--

Specific Talking:

The best planting techniques, medicinal plants, ornamentals vs. natural species in the prevention of soil erosion, providing habitat for various species, and how we can create new top soils. i.e. composting vs. burning

Academic Advisor: Professor of Environmental Studies

General Topic:

14. Consumerism--

Specific Talking:

What are our rights as consumers and how we can use our consumer dollars to effect change.

Guest Speaker: Professor of Economics

General Topic:

15. "The Greens"--

Specific Talking:

A look at the Green Party, its history and the effects that this internationally known environmental group create.

Guest Speaker: member of the Green Party

General Topic:

16. Politics and the Environment--

Specific Talking:

A look at our current government and the effects that their potential policies will have on our National and State Recreational Areas. In addition, we will look at the impact that changing the Clean Air and Water Acts will have on us and our environment.

Guest Speaker: Professor of Political Science

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